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Official Deception on Paris Bombings

French officials are deliberately misleading their own people and the international press about the true source of the terrorist bombings that have rocked Paris in recent months. They may be trying to cover up a secret deal that the French hope will end the carnage.

Responsibility for the indiscriminate bombings, which killed 10 persons and wounded 162, was claimed by an unknown group called the Committee for Solidarity with Arab and Middle Eastern Political Prisoners. "With" may be the key word.

Each bombing was followed by a demand to release three terrorists held in French prisons. Two, Georges Abdallah and Anis Naccache, are Maronite Christian Lebanese; the third, Varadjian Garbidjian, is an Armenian Christian, born in Syria.

French officials from Prime Minister Jacques Chirac down have convinced the press that Abdallah is the key individual. He heads a small terrorist group, the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Factions, but is charged with only minor crimes in France. There's not enough evidence on which to hold Abdallah for very long; the French will have to set him free in a few years at most.

Naccache, who bungled an attempt to assassinate an Iranian exile leader, is small potatoes. He doesn't even belong to a terrorist organization capable of a series of bombings.

As for Garbidjian, he is serving a life sentence, with no chance of parole, for the 1983 bombing at Orly Airport outside Paris that killed seven persons. He asserted responsibility for the bombing.

Garbidjian is a top leader—if not No. 1—of one of the deadliest terrorist groups in the world: the

Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA). In the last decade, ASALA assassins have killed more than 70 Turkish officials, family members and bystanders, and have wounded more than 300 in attacks all over the world. ASALA demands that the present Turkish government admit the genocide of Armenians during World War I, and that an independent Armenian homeland be carved out of eastern Turkey.

Our sources, who are terrorism experts in various Western intelligence agencies, believe Garbidjian is the French prisoner whose release is the crucial demand of the Paris bombers. In this scenario, Abdallah, the Lebanese terrorist, is just a red herring to divert the press from a deal over Garbidjian. In fact, a similar situation developed five years ago.

On Oct. 25, 1981, ASALA launched a series of 15 bombings in Paris to win the release of an ASALA leader, Monte Melkonian, and better treatment for four other members charged with the takeover of the Turkish consulate in Paris, in which a security guard was killed.

Our sources confirm that the French cut a deal with ASALA in January 1982. The bombings stopped, Melkonian was set free and the four other ASALA prisoners were given light sentences.

The truce blew up—literally—with the Orly Airport bombing. Although Garbidjian tried to convince the French it was an accident, they sentenced him to life. Our inquiries into the Garbidjian link have made French sources nervous. Meanwhile, though, Chirac has succeeded in selling the story that Abdallah is behind the bombings.